

Minutes of the plenary session of the International Task Force for Co-operation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research, under the chairmanship of the French delegate,
Mr. Norbert Engel,
Paris, Centre de Conférences Internationales,
Room 3, Wednesday 26 June 2002 – 9.30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Delegations present: Argentina, Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, United Kingdom, USA, Council of Europe, Mr. Yehuda Bauer

– Absent: 0

1) Admission of new International Task Force for Co-operation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (ITF) members

a) Admission of the Czech delegation

The Chairman called upon Mr. Lex van den Ham, the delegate for the Netherlands, to speak in presentation of the Czech delegation.

Mr. van den Ham began his statement by recalling that the first liaison project between the Netherlands and the Czech Republic had begun in 1999. This was a training course for Czech teachers. It has since served as a model for numerous activities initiated in various other countries. On behalf of the Dutch delegation, Mr. van den Ham expressed his pleasure in welcoming the Czech Republic as a full member of the ITF.

Mr. Norbert Engel then called upon Ms. Helena Dluhosova, representing the Czech delegation, to speak.

Ms. Helena Dluhosova stated that if the Czech Republic was now a member of the ITF, this was because its involvement in research into the Holocaust was already longstanding. Nevertheless, the ITF represented a major step forward for the Czech Republic. She thanked the various partners in this cooperative venture and those who provided assistance in connection with the projects implemented.

b) Admission of the Lithuanian delegation

Mr. Norbert Engel then gave the floor to Mr. Stephen Smith, delegate for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Stephen Smith noted that over the two years of cooperation between the United Kingdom and Lithuania, the latter had become a major actor in the domain of Holocaust education. Liaison projects had been conducted on the basis of programmes of high quality in terms of Holocaust education and remembrance. Lithuania has achieved a remarkable position because of the extensive experience accumulated and the innovative nature of the projects implemented.

Mr. Norbert Engel then called upon Mr. Justas Vincas Paleckis, representing the Lithuanian delegation.

Mr. Justas Vincas Paleckis made clear that the admission of Lithuania into the ITF is an event of fundamental importance, given the need to ensure that the tragic past of Lithuania not be forgotten. Moreover, its inclusion in the ITF comes at a time when Lithuania is opening up to the outside world. In 2004, it is to become a member of both NATO and the European Union.

With respect to the Lithuanian working group, twelve projects have been debated and are in the course of being implemented. Eight new projects will be presented at a later time.

The role allocated to Holocaust remembrance in Lithuania is continuing to grow in importance. There have been 50 or so recent publications on the topic. This issue also is being aired in schools, in the military, and in the press. The wall of silence that had continued to exist in the country has now disappeared.

Mr. Paleckis went on to thank the British delegation and its representatives, Messrs Smith and Kidner, for their sincere and friendly support.

Mr. Paleckis then indicated that further new projects may be set in train, notably in Vilnius, where museums and exhibitions are to be organised, with a possibility of ITF input. Similarly, it is necessary to strengthen cooperation between Lithuania and Poland. Greater importance must be attached to common projects within the framework of the ITF.

Mr. Paleckis thanked the French delegation for its excellent chairmanship.

Mr. Norbert Engel thanked Mr. Paleckis warmly. On the occasion of three separate visits to Lithuania, he had been able to see for himself the extent of the work done. He expressed his pleasure at the quality of the relationship between the government and Lithuania's Jewish community.

c) Admission of the Argentinian delegation

Mr. Norbert Engel called upon Mr. Randolph Bell, representing the American delegation.

Mr. Randolph Bell made clear that cooperation between the United States and Argentina was not a new phenomenon. It was, however, necessary at the present time to take into account the difficult context in which Argentina finds itself. But despite this, it is impossible to be unaware of the commitment of Argentina in the area of Holocaust education and remembrance.

Mr. Norbert Engel stated that he had been impressed by the way in which the issue has been addressed in Argentina, and this in spite of the current difficulties. He then called upon Mr. Alejandro Dosoretz, the Argentinian delegate.

Mr. Alejandro Dosoretz thanked all the members for having declared themselves to be in favour of Argentina's full and unrestricted participation in the ITF.

The true beginning of Argentina's interest in the issue of the Holocaust dates to 1988, under the presidency of Raul Alfonsin, thanks to the introduction of legislation against racial discrimination. In addition, Argentina was the first Latin American state to initiate research on the presence of former Nazis on its national territory and the influence of that presence on the national culture. The admission of Argentina into the ITF is certainly capable of increasing the impact of Holocaust education on the younger generation and enhancing future awareness of this subject.

Mr. Dosoretz stated that Argentina had given a serious commitment to abide by the Stockholm declaration.

Lastly, by becoming a member of the ITF, the Argentinian delegation hoped to further intensify its interactions with the other member countries.

Mr. Norbert Engel then proposed that the membership of the three countries thus presented should be put to the vote.

<p>The Czech Republic, Lithuania, and Argentina were approved as members of the ITF by unanimous vote.</p>

2) Presentation of Hungary's application for membership

Mr. Norbert Engel set out the reasons for his visit to Hungary and informed the meeting that it was the wish of all members to welcome Hungary officially into the ITF.

Ms. Marta Fazeckas, representing Hungary, provided a presentation of the educational programmes currently in under way in her country, such as training seminars for teachers conducted by the Hannah Arendt Association and the Auschwitz Foundation. Ms. Fazeckas also described the Hungarian legislation adopted in connection with the Holocaust and indicated that a Day of Holocaust remembrance was now to be observed in schools every year (on 16 April). In addition, many events had been organised around this topic for 2002, among which was a touring exhibition devoted to Raoul Wallenberg and a competition for students.

Mr. Norbert Engel thanked Ms. Fazeckas for her very complete presentation and called upon the delegates to take the floor.

Responding to a question from the USA, Ms. Fazeckas stated that **bilateral relations** had already been instituted by Hungary on the issue of Holocaust education, with Yad Vashem for example, for the organisation of a training seminar for approximately a hundred Hungarian teachers.

Where Sweden was concerned, Ms. Fazeckas indicated that **Raoul Wallenberg has been given a high profile in Hungary**. Not only does a street in Budapest bear his name, but also the 90th anniversary of the birth of this symbolic figure is to be celebrated officially in July 2002. Conversely, acknowledgment of the role of the other diplomats active in conjunction with Wallenberg is much less marked.

Responding to a question from Poland, Ms. Fazeckas stated that Holocaust education now plays a major part in Hungarian **school study programmes**.

In response to a question from the USA, Ms. Fazeckas reported on the progress made on **a project for the construction of a Holocaust museum** in Budapest. The search for a suitable site is currently under way and work is likely to begin in September 2002. Additionally, work on the renovation of the Páva Street Synagogue has begun.

Responding once again to a question from the USA concerning the ban on exports of **archives** held in Hungary, Ms. Fazeckas announced that she would seek to bring influence to bear in order to improve this legislation.

Responding to Poland on the continuation of the current exhibition in Hungary, **Mr. Szita Szabolcs** stated that it would be extended and that the film *Sobibor* had been shown on

Hungarian television, prefaced by a statement by Mr. Claude Lanzmann.

Answering a question from the United Kingdom on **Hungary's contributions to the ITF**, Ms. Fazeckas stated that the aim of Hungary was to put forward examples of innovative projects in the field of Holocaust education.

Mr. Norbert Engel asked the Hungarian delegation to withdraw in order to allow ITF delegates to express their views and vote on the application for membership.

Ms. Shulamit Imber, member of the Israeli delegation, stated that the involvement of Hungary in Holocaust education is genuine and strong, that the projects undertaken are of high quality and that, given these facts, Hungary was worthy of ITF membership.

Mr. Randolph Bell indicated that cooperation between Hungary and the USA had been productive and that it had become necessary, particularly from the diplomatic point of view, to include a Hungarian delegation in the ITF.

Mr. Hans Winkler announced that Austria supported the application of Hungary as a neighbouring and friendly state. Numerous cooperative projects were already under way between the two countries. In addition, the work undertaken by the ITF could not come to fruition if the countries of central Europe were not included.

Mr. Norbert Engel indicated that France was concerned to see the inclusion of Hungary in the ITF.

Mr. Arye Meckel announced that Israel gave its full support to Hungary's application. It was important, he said, for the ITF to bring in more members in order for it to gain in strength.

Mr. Lex van den Ham announced that the Netherlands was in favour of Hungary's membership.

Hungary's application for membership of the ITF was unanimously accepted by the members. Its formal admission into the ITF will take place at the plenary session held on 16 October 2002 in Strasbourg.

Mr. Norbert Engel invited the various delegations to make known whether they were candidates to be Hungary's Lead Country.

Mr. Arye Meckel requested that Hungary send an official letter setting out a formal project proposal. He then put forward Israel's application for appointment as Hungary's Lead Country.

Mr. Jean-Marc Dreyfus stated that the Chair had not as yet received an official letter from the Hungarian government giving a commitment to abide by the conditions governing admission to membership of the ITF.

Mr. Norbert Engel announced to the Hungarian delegates that they would be admitted as members of the ITF in the near future under Israel's leadership, and requested that they provide an official letter from their government as soon as possible.

3) Presentation of applications for ITF Chairmanship

Mr. Randolph Bell announced that the United States government considered the ITF as an organisation of great importance. He indicated that he had been invited to provide a presentation of the group's activities to Senate representatives. He then announced the United States' application to succeed France as Chair of the ITF.

Mr. Marcello Pezzetti, submitted, on behalf of the Italian government, Italy's application for 2004.

<p>It was resolved that the Chair would rotate as follows:</p>

<p>2003: USA</p>

<p>2004: Italy (to be confirmed)</p>

4) The role of the Holocaust in education on Human Rights

Mr. Yehuda Bauer, special advisor to the ITF, stated that the Stockholm Declaration was very clear on this point: Holocaust education must necessarily address the issue of Human Rights.

Mr. Hans Winkler asserted that intolerance and racism were topics to be approached with great care. The ITF should not move away from its initial objectives since the role it plays and its assigned objective make it unique as an organisation. It was not necessary to broaden the scope of ITF action to include topical issues.

Mr. Stephen Smith asserted that the ITF had a part to play in this area. It could not be perceived as an institution dealing with anything other than intolerance and racism.

Mr. Randolph Bell added that the power of the message sent out by the ITF in this domain should not be underestimated. Its role could also be to provide input into debates conducted outside its own forum, but the aim of its meetings is not completely identical to that of the Stockholm Forum.

Mr. Jacques Fredj stated that the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the conflict in the Middle East were making more difficult the work of bodies addressing the Holocaust. It was necessary, he said, to avoid tackling topical issues head on.

Mr. Arye Meckel suggested that the focus should be on the initial mandate of the ITF, this being Holocaust education. Account should be taken of the failure of the Durban Conference, as well as the worrying rise of anti-Semitism, and excessive involvement in current events should be avoided. The objective must be to use Holocaust education to send out a strong message to young people. The Holocaust must therefore be treated as a unique event in all countries, the aim being one of prevention.

Mr. Lex van den Ham added that it was necessary to avoid involvement in such debates. The framework provided by the Stockholm Declaration leaves sufficient room for manoeuvre. The Holocaust was a unique event. It was not necessary to continue the discussion.

Mr. Albert Spiegel stated that the ITF is a very specific body that must focus on Holocaust education and remembrance in order to prevent future events of the same kind. Its method of working, bringing together as it does government and scientific representatives, is in itself unique.

Ms. Helena Dluhosova added that it was necessary to gather more information to ensure better teaching. The results of historical studies are extremely important for improving Holocaust education.

Mr. Hans Winkler asserted that the role of the ITF must be to send out a message to national authorities to ensure that Holocaust education is given the importance it deserves in government action plans.

Mr. Ulf Larsson added that the ITF must continue the work it does now, abiding by the Stockholm Declaration. He also stated that the Prime Minister of Sweden had announced that a further international conference on the Holocaust would be held in 2003.

Mr. Yehuda Bauer noted the consensus prevailing in the ITF. The nature of its task is highly specific and it must be performed within the framework of the Stockholm Declaration. The aim of the ITF is to raise awareness of the Holocaust. It is necessary to continue down this path.

Mr. Norbert Engel thanked those present for their extremely interesting input. He indicated that he could see a consensus among the delegations on the central importance of the Holocaust in the work of the ITF, adding that he was happy that this should be so.

5) Reports from working group meetings

a) Education Working Group

The proposals of the Education Working Group were presented by **Mr. Bill Shulman**.

The first proposal, relating to a training seminar in Argentina to be funded by the USA with a budget of USD 6,000 on the basis of their combined interests, was approved.

Two other proposals were made, the first relating to a new Lithuanian project, the second concerning a film to be considered by an ad hoc committee.

Mr. Bill Shulman proposed that all countries participating in the Education Working Group should put forward their projects without delay in order to speed up the approval of proposals.

Mr. Jean-Marc Dreyfus stated that the Fund Working Group had set up a subcommittee in order to settle procedural difficulties and to facilitate the decision process. With respect to the project for the Lithuanian film *Ghetto*, which is still outstanding, he suggested that a new committee should be formed.

Mr. Yehuda Bauer expressed his disagreement with this proposal.

Ms. Shulamit Imber added that more time was needed to reach a final decision on this project.

b) Memorial Working Group

Mr. Stephen Smith asserted that the work undertaken was of major importance. It seemed to him to be necessary, with the help of Julie Hock, to set up a database describing all existing sites in each country, to which all the delegations could contribute information. A model for this database could thus be submitted in October 2002 at the Strasbourg meeting. It was therefore necessary to designate a contact person in each delegation and to begin sustained cooperative efforts on this.

In addition, concerning the budget, the Memorial Working Group asked if it would be possible to obtain financial assistance from the Task Force Fund.

c) Academic Working Group

Mr. Yehuda Bauer announced that the building of the database had not been completed. A person had been appointed to remedy this a month previously.

Moving on to the archive question, Mr. Bauer stated that no access was possible to Belgian archives. He asked the Chair to provide its assistance to ensure that they would be opened up to researchers.

Mr. Arthur Berger added that this problem involved all governments. Researchers had already sent a letter to the International Tracing Service (ITS) in Arolsen, Germany, which was not receiving researchers' requests. Diplomatic approaches were under way for the adoption of new guidelines. Mr. Berger asked the Chair to send a letter to the ITS to ensure that researchers would enjoy faster access to the archives.

Mr. Francis Lott stated that the most recent meeting of the ITS council had not enabled a conclusion to be reached. The main problem was financial in nature. An agreement with Germany was also to be signed by October 2002.

Mr. Norbert Engel announced that the Chair was willing to pass on delegations' requests officially, using a template submitted by the Academic Working Group.

It was resolved that a letter would be sent by the Chair.
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d) Information Working Group

Ms. Julie Hock is responsible for reporting on the work of the group. There is a suggestion that a new page should be added to the Web site providing information on the issue of compensation for the victims of looting and that links to other organisations connected with Holocaust remembrance should be included.

Mr. Norbert Engel stated that currently a distinction is made between the issue of restitution of looted property and matters pertaining to Holocaust remembrance and education. He asked Ms. Hock to justify the addition of this information to the ITF Web site.

Mr. Jacques Fredj asserted that it would not be useful to create a new page. Conversely, he proposed the inclusion of links to sites connected with Holocaust education.

<p>It was resolved unanimously that new links should be added to the ITF Web site.</p>

e) Task Force Fund

The financial points were addressed by **Mr. Ulf Larsson**, who provided an overview of the current financial position of the ITF.

Mr. Jean-Marc Dreyfus added that a minor change in project funding was proposed by the group according to which the Chair would be able to receive project proposals directly and itself initiate the usual decision procedure. This would allow a greater number of projects to be submitted and ensure that procedures were substantially simplified.

Mr. Norbert Engel added with respect to subscription payments that these were still outstanding in the case of some countries. Certain delegations continued to encounter administrative hurdles. He suggested that a call for subscription payments should be sent to each delegation by the Chair.

<p>It was resolved unanimously that a call for subscription payments should be sent out by the Chair.</p>
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f) Czech Working Group

g) Argentina

h) Lithuania

i) Latvia

j) Hungary

k) Romania

l) Slovakia

6) Proposed by-laws

Mr. Norbert Engel raised this issue, indicating that many member countries were encountering difficulties in making their subscription payments because the ITF has no by-laws.

Mr. Jean-Marc Dreyfus pointed out that a set of draft by-laws had been circulated to all delegation members. He requested that they study this text.

Mr. Norbert Engel proposed that comments and amendments be sent by e-mail to the Chair, which would submit a final version that could be signed in October 2002 in Strasbourg at the plenary session.

<p>The proposal to adopt by-laws for the ITF was unanimously approved, along with the drafting arrangements.</p>

Mr. Ulf Larsson raised the question of the fund's substantial reserve and the difficulties encountered in disbursing this money. On this point, he suggested that project proposals should be sent directly to the Chair without first going through a Lead Country. He asked the ITF to approve these changes.

Jean-Marc Dreyfus stated that the number of project proposals was increasing, and that given their average cost another 40 or so projects could be funded.